

# Mountain Lions in Kansas

The debate has been resolved. Are there wild mountain lions in Kansas? Yes, there are. The status of Mountain Lions in Kansas has been verified recently by Kansas Department of Wildlife & Parks officials. The second apparently wild mountain lion was verified by evidence around Wakeeney, Kansas in October 2009. In November, 2007, a young male mountain lion was shot by a landowner in Barber County. The questions of whether we have mountain lions have gone on for many years, not only in Kansas but all over in the Midwest. There seems to be no shortage of myths and legends surrounding these big cats. If you have lived in Kansas for very long, you probably know someone who has claimed to see one.

Mountain lions (also known as cougars or pumas) are large, slender cats with a small head and a long, heavy tail. They may weigh up to 150 lbs and are normally tan to orange in color. Mountain lions prefer dense vegetation and will rely on wooded riparian areas for travel. Young males have been known to move up to 400 miles in search of an area not already inhabited by another mountain lion. An established territory may be 100 square miles or more (about 2/3 the size of Fort Riley).



Mountain Lion

Little is known about the habits of mountain lions in the Great Plains. Records indicate that they were found throughout Kansas, and were even common in some parts of the state. They seemed to be most abundant in the rugged Red Hills and Chautauqua Hills area of south central Kansas. Before 2007, the last confirmed mountain lion in Kansas was taken in 1904 in Ellis County. Deer make up about 80% of their diet and mountain lions may kill up to one per day. They have also been found to consume rats, rabbits, coyotes and bobcats. One strange item on their menu is a particular fondness for porcupines.

Wild mountain lions have now been documented in every state that borders Kansas. The closest recent sighting besides the two in Kansas was in 2000 in Howard County Nebraska, about 200 miles north of Fort Riley. There have been over 30 confirmed mountain lion sightings in Nebraska since the early 1990s, mostly in the western part of the state. In several of those cases, the animal was either shot or found dead. The most recent sighting was from a trail camera set up to take pictures near a deer feeder. Imagine the surprise that hunter had when those pictures were downloaded!

The state of Missouri has had 10 confirmed sightings of free ranging mountain lions since 1994. Prior to that, the last confirmation was in 1927. Unlike Nebraska, which borders states with resident populations, the cats found in Missouri are a bit of a mystery. The closest known resident population to Missouri is in Texas. It is unclear of the origin of the Missouri cats, although it is a possibility that at least some were captive animals turned loose. Most of the documented sightings in Missouri have been in the southern part of the state near Arkansas.

While it is unlikely that a mountain lion resides in the Fort Riley area, it certainly is a possibility. The one thing that is rarer than mountain lions is proof. If in fact you do find possible evidence, please, contact the Conservation Branch at (785) 239-6211 or stop by our office at 407 Pershing Court.